**Tasting Pentecost**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The sermon on the Mount, seems at first as though it is the Moral and ethical teaching of Jesus Christ, and it's been taken as that by many. It’s more than moral and spiritual teaching. The sermon on the Mount is a call to holiness, not just goodness and decency and justice among men in a fallen world. It is a call to holiness. It is a taste that Christ is giving to those who are listening to his preaching about the Kingdom of God, and the ways of the Kingdom of God. It is a preaching about a way of life that is in fact not yet possible to them. But he wants to lift them up. He wants them to desire that life that is beyond us. Beyond our own capacity within ourselves to achieve. He's reminding them, without saying so explicitly, that we are created in the image and likeness not of this world, but in the image and likeness of God. Until the descent of the Holy Spirit, holiness is not possible. A lot of things are possible; goodness and decency are possible, but not holiness. There have been many teachings of moral and ethical principle, based on our human capacity to have loyalty to another, to cling to one another, to not betray one another, to be faithful to one another. But there was a point beyond which we were incapable of going because we were not able to have the relationship to God himself that makes it possible for us to be more than human, but to be fully human by communion with God. There is a clash between the morality and the ethics of men, on one hand; what we are capable of, and we are capable of a lot, we are capable of a much greater level of decency than often we find in the world, in a society where there is little sense of belonging to one another, little sense of loyalty to the best in a human being. It’s hard to recall what goodness and decency human beings have been capable of; in family life, or as we intentionally try to set it up in a game — team sports — the loyalty of each member of that team to the others, in the pursuit of an excellence and capacity that none of them could achieve by themselves; or the loyalty amongst men and women in the military; a level of integrity. And then comes that that word that human beings can't do without when it comes to relying on our own capacities, if we are going to inspire ourselves and others together, in loyalty to one another — to the highest things. And that word is pride.

How can it be such a good thing when it is found amongst people who depend on one another for their very lives, in some cases? Pride in the group of people that we are members of. Pride in the task that needs to be accomplished; the work that needs to be done. In all these cases we are talking about things that human beings are capable of, drawn out of them because of their love and companionship for those whom they are with. It is unworthy of any member of that team or that group or that family, to betray the others. It is unworthy of them. It’s unworthy of the family. It’s unworthy of the team. It's unworthy of the nation. But when it comes to God, the situation is different. How do we go about being worthy of God? In that case, we're dealing not with a capacity that we already have, but something that is beyond us; and yet we are told we're created in his image and likeness. And so, there is something in us goes beyond what pride amongst men and women on their own can achieve can accomplish. In fact, in our relationship to God, pride is something that stands in the way. How can we be proud before God, of own capacity to be like him? We have no capacity to be like him. We have only this calling, this longing that Jesus is reaching out to in the Sermon on the Mount.

When we’re growing up. there’s a point in the life of most, many, maybe even all of us, where the loyalty that we had to our mother and our father and our sisters and our brothers, suddenly is tested; by a loyalty that we now begin to feel to our friends; others of our own age; our social group. There is a conflict between loyalty to the family and loyalty to our friends, that social group. There is a similar kind of conflict between, on the one hand, our loyalty to what ever group, organization we identify with in the world; might be a professional organization or almost any group of people whose values we share. We have a sense of loyalty to them. There is a pride in the values of that group. On the other hand there is our life as members of the Body of Christ, the holy Church of God. We can say “my family,” “my team,” but if we say “my church;” there’s something gone awry with that, there’s something wrong with that. It’s not “my” church. It’s not a group of people that are bound together by common values that we are capable of fulfilling as human beings.

Now there was a point in the history of the world where half the globe, “the West,” ran into a kind of conflict, where in the end, this conflict was resolved by saying human beings are not capable rising above their own humanity and having communion with God; not capable of working on their own spiritual salvation in synergy with God; “obviously people are not capable of that, we lost that in the Fall. We have a legal relationship to God in the sense that, God commanded and we betrayed, Adam and Eve broke the commandment that God gave them and so, we are condemned.

Outside of the Orthodox Christian faith, there is no sense that there is something that goes beyond what human beings are capable of on their own, that we were given access to again by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is possible. A holiness of our participation in divine life — the life of God himself. And in the world, just as when we were teenagers, and there was a conflict between our values of our friends and our loyalty to them and our loyalty to the family; we experience in our life in the world a conflict between our life in the world and the values of the world, and what Christ is calling us to in the Sermon on the Mount. They are not the same thing. Being faithful to the members of a group and their values; sharing those values, not betraying them; even possibly taking a certain quiet or humble pride in them, the pride of a workman when they do good work for the sake of the work, not for the sake of their own glorification, but for the sake of the work itself; can we say that there is a kind of pride that Christians would not condemn? It depends, I think, on whether that pride becomes a spiritual pride. Spiritual pride, even in the world, is a problem. Members of a football team. Some are for the team and others are for themselves. Showboats. Excellent capacity, maybe even leading their teams on to victory. But that kind of pride; that kind of spiritual pride. Pride in our own abilities above the abilities of all others, that we would say — that’s a problem. That’s a spiritual problem. But we can learn from our loyalty to good work, and our loyalty to others that we don’t want to betray, our friends and our family. When we have that conflict maybe it’s not such a bad thing that that conflict is there, because, in both cases, in the case of the conflict between our values and our loyalty to our family that we grew up with as children, and our values with our friends; in that case and on the other case, the conflict between the values of the world, many of which are good and laudable, but are not oriented toward holiness, after all; not oriented toward what is worthy of God. In both case, the conflict is because we are in a situation where growth is necessary — possible and necessary.

The child grows, and whatever conflict there may have been, takes its proper place in relationship to respect for the parents, love of the family; and the conflict passes away. It's possible for us to be faithful and loyal members of worldly groups, and yet if a point comes when something beyond what is worldly is demanded of us; is a kind of spiritual pride in being members of that group, or people who are like members of that group comes, then we have to say no, beyond that it belongs to God, it touches my relationship to God; what is worthy of God. Being worthy of God was not possible; being Holy was not possible, until Christ came, made it possible, destroyed the power of death over us and sent the Holy Spirit. With the descent of the Holy Spirit, holiness becomes possible for us. Holiness, and a sustained holiness even, by faithfulness and loyalty to God becomes possible to us. When we are Baptized, we are baptized into a oneness, not as members of a group a worldly group, some people understand church that way and that’s not what we’re talking about. The Orthodox Church is an unworldly Church. It’s about our growth as members of the Body of Christ. When we are Baptized and we are Chrismated we become members of the Body of Christ. He is Holy. And we are marked and set apart — as Holy. All of the bad things that we say about pride in spiritual literature have to do with that relationship to God. How do we become worthy of God? Not by way of worldly pride, only by way of a different thing, only by way of humility. Conversion from being a worldly person to being a Christian is a matter of conversion from pride in what we can do, to humility before the fact of what we cannot do and yet are called to do. Conversion to being what we are not able to be, and yet are called to be. What we can always be by way of oneness with Christ God. That is our spiritual calling. And in that spiritual effort, pride has no place; because we have no capacity to be like Christ. We can only be like Christ by being at one with him, we can only be like Christ by way of humility. And so it is a higher level of life that we're called to. This becomes very confusing to us at the moment that we try to blend these two in our mind: life in the world on the one hand, and our life that we are called to live in Christ on the other. If we try to find some kind of peace between them, so that is no conflict between the world in Christ, we're going to end up affirming the values of the world, because that’s where our capacities lie. Only by humility can we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and be faithful to Christ, constantly.

And if we look at the lives of each one of the saints on our icon of All the Saints of North America, we will find a lesson in each case where that process of growth and conflict between the life of the world and a higher spiritual life is resolved by “dying to the world,” as we say, an arising in Christ as we do in Baptism; descending into the waters, and arising to a life in Christ. Our spiritual life is a constant effort to turn our backs on the world whenever it comes to our relationship to God — what is worthy of him. But then there is the Church. How different is our relationship to one another as members of the Body of Christ? It’s not a matter of loyalty to some kind of pride that we can take in our Church as “our” church. It’s always a matter of loyalty and faithfulness to Christ on the part of each and every one of us, where we raise ourselves up together; by keeping our orientation toward Christ keep confessing where we have missed the mark, and helping the others to do the same. In this life there is no place for selfishness; for worldly pride. All of our relationships with one another in the Church are governed by the rule of Christ, and that is, we are one body, His Body humility room price and that is we are one body his body; the body of Christ. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.